

Neighborhood Planning

Strengthening the City's commitment to collaborative neighborhood improvement

10.1 Introduction

Neighborhood Planning in Round Rock has its roots in the 1990 General Plan. The 1990 Plan recognized that a home is the single largest investment most individuals make in their lifetime, that neighborhoods are the building blocks of a community, and that the City needs to take measures to strengthen this basic structure of our community. The 1990 General Plan specifically stated that “older residential neighborhoods have a unique character and neighborhood identification should be protected.” The goals and objectives of the General Plan 2000 reinforce the recommendations made in the 1990 Plan by emphasizing that Round Rock should establish policies and programs that strengthen and preserve neighborhood integrity. Objectives to achieve this goal specify that the City should:

- ◆ reinvest in the infrastructure of the City's older areas;
- ◆ ensure strong, consistent code enforcement to maintain neighborhood integrity;
- ◆ investigate methods and incentives to bring existing developed properties into conformity with new ordinances;
- ◆ ensure compatible land uses adjacent to neighborhoods;
- ◆ avoid the creation of large concentrations of apartments in any one area of the city; and
- ◆ continue the Neighborhood Planning Program.

10.2 Neighborhood Planning Program

The Neighborhood Planning Program has become an established program within the Round Rock Planning and Community Development Department. This collaborative program includes representation not only from residents in a particular neighborhood but also from businesses and institutions within the neighborhood. Since 1994, the Planning Department has coordinated three neighborhood planning efforts with neighborhood representatives and City department representatives. While the goals for these efforts have been unique to each neighborhood, each resultant program shared similar long-range goals of strengthening the identity of residential areas, stabilizing and improving property values, and helping guide change within the neighborhood.

The downtown neighborhood was the first group to request a Neighborhood Plan. The City was very eager to respond to this request to demonstrate a commitment to protecting the character and history of the older downtown area. A Neighborhood Planning Team (NPT), comprised of citizen representatives from the neighborhood, was appointed by the City Council in March 1994 to identify problems and concerns ranging from non-conforming uses to maintenance of architectural character within the downtown area. Meetings were held over a period of eight months with the NPT working through and discussing problems and concerns with representatives from various City departments. During this time, City staff was also preparing a study to help derive solutions to the problems identified by the NPT. Solutions and recommendations were then proposed by the NPT to implement the plan. The City Council adopted the Downtown Plan in December 1994.

The Greater Round Rock West NPT began its work with the Planning Department staff in June 1996. Representatives from six residential areas of the Round Rock West subdivisions met over a period of six months to discuss neighborhood issues and concerns. Among other issues, the Greater Round Rock West Plan addresses traffic problems, recommends locations for new sidewalks, and calls for greater communication between the neighborhood and the City. The Plan was adopted by City Council Resolution in February 1997. As with the Downtown Plan, the Greater Round Rock West Plan contains an Implementation Plan that sets deadlines for addressing the concerns of the NPT.

The Northeast Neighborhood Improvement Process (NIP) is the most recent neighborhood planning effort (1998). This program differed from the previous efforts in two respects. First, an NPT was not established but, rather, residents from the three northeast neighborhoods, Egger's Acres, Mesa Ridge, and Mesa Village, were all invited to attend. This change from previous formats was brought about due to the complete buildout of the area to be studied. Second, rather than producing a plan for the whole neighborhood, specific improvement plans were developed by the

residents. To identify the necessary improvements for the neighborhood, staff facilitated a brainstorming session. The NIP was completed within a twelve-week period. At its conclusion, a sidewalk plan and street lighting plan were recommended. Both plans were presented to the City Council and have since been incorporated into the City's Sidewalk Plan and into the City's and TU Electric's future street lighting plans, respectively. In addition to the improvement plans, a "Neighborhood Guide to City Services" was also produced. The purpose of the guide is to help neighborhood residents identify key persons who can assist them in addressing neighborhood issues, concerns, and problems. It will be a resource in future planning efforts.

10.3 Implementation Plans

Actions and Deadlines Implementation Plans have been adopted by Council resolution for the two Neighborhood Plans: the Downtown Plan and the Greater Round Rock West Neighborhood Plan. The Actions and Deadlines have been developed during the NPT process to address the concerns that are prioritized during the planning process. Team members and City department head representatives each take responsibility for completing actions on items that are directly related to their areas of concern and expertise. From the date of Neighborhood Plan adoption, short term actions are to be implemented within 1-2 years, medium term actions within 2-3 years, and long term actions within 3-5 years. These plans which are reviewed on an annual basis function as advisory documents and help guide actions affecting the neighborhood. The Planning and Community Development Department coordinates the annual review and a report is then presented to the City Manager.

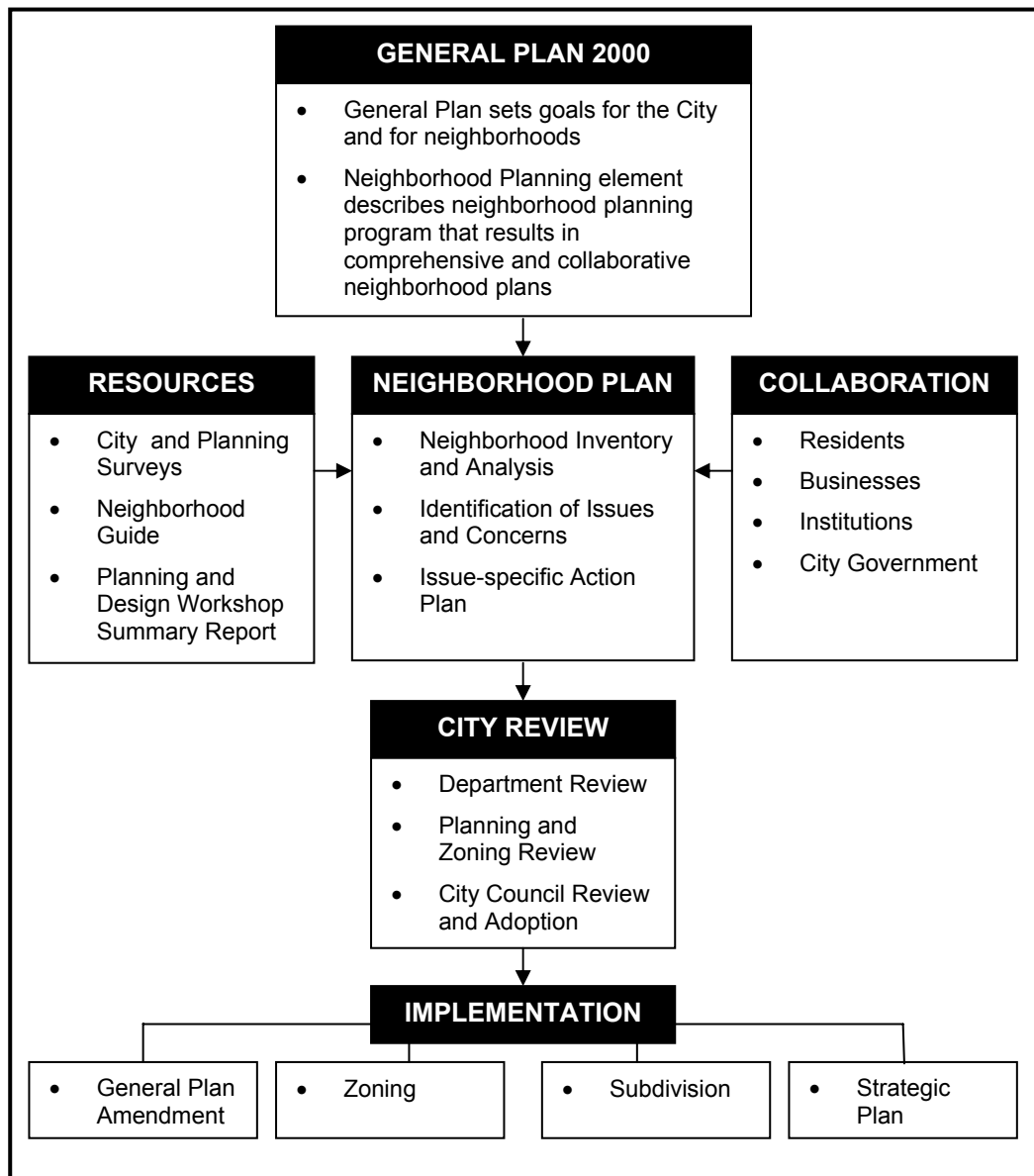
10.4 Future Adoption Process

Citizen participants in the General Plan 2000 revision process were particularly pleased with the efforts made to date in the Neighborhood Planning Program. In fact, included in the General Plan 2000 goals and objectives is a statement indicating support for the program. However, the program is still growing and a legal framework is needed to ensure that there is a clear understanding of the relationship between the General Plan and the Neighborhood Planning element of the Plan. Figure 10.1. depicts this relationship.

As in any system or process, each step is important. Citizen communication with the City and neighborhood involvement in the decision making process is improved by initiating a Neighborhood Plan. Neighborhood residents have first hand knowledge of problems in their neighborhood that the City may not be aware. However, acknowledging and identifying the problems is only the beginning. Participation in the Neighborhood Planning Process also includes an Action Plan which allows everyone to

collaborate in solving problems. Some problems are better addressed by the Neighborhood Association while others require the City's attention. After City review of the Neighborhood Plan, it is implemented through an amendment to the General Plan. This solidifies the connection between the General Plan and the Neighborhood Plan and reinforces the goals and objectives from the planning process. To further implement the Neighborhood Plan, it may also be necessary to amend the City's zoning and subdivision regulations as well as the Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan amendments insure that required actions are put into the City's timetable and workplan and that there is accountability for addressing problems.

Figure 10.1 Neighborhood Planning & General Plan



10.5 Community Development Programs

In addition to the Neighborhood Planning Program, the City has other opportunities to implement revitalization programs for neighborhoods. These programs are funded through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) annual Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and are coordinated through the Office of Community Development in the Planning and Community Development Department. The CDBG funds community development activities that include conducting neighborhood revitalization strategies. The City has been able to fund some of the necessary park improvements identified in the Downtown Plan and the Northeast Improvement Process through the CDBG program.

Strategies for neighborhood revitalization are very clearly defined within the HUD process. Neighborhood revitalization strategies may be submitted as part of the City's Consolidated Plan, the five-year HUD Plan which outlines the City's priorities in housing, community development, and economic development. When applicable, HUD's approval of the Consolidated Plan will also state its approval of the revitalization strategy either as part of the Consolidated Plan or as an amendment to it. HUD's approval of a neighborhood revitalization strategy must be expressly stated prior to either funding or activities.

Neighborhood revitalization strategies seek to create partnerships or collaborations among the City, the private sector, community organizations, and neighborhood residents. The City recognizes the necessity of collaborating in problem-solving in order to achieve success in revitalization efforts. Successful neighborhood revitalization strategies bring together neighborhood and community stakeholders to forge partnerships that achieve the following:

- ◆ obtain commitments to neighborhood-building;
- ◆ make neighborhoods attractive for investments, thereby creating a market for profits;
- ◆ generate neighborhood participation to ensure that the benefits of economic activity are reinvested in the neighborhood for long-term community development;
- ◆ support the use of neighborhood intermediary institutions such as Community-Based Development Organizations (CBDOs), Community Development Corporations (CDCs), Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs), and religious institutions to bridge gaps between government, business, community groups, and residents; and
- ◆ foster the growth of resident-based initiatives to identify and address their needs.

A neighborhood revitalization strategy is designed to provide for the economic empowerment of the low- and moderate-income residents of a particular neighborhood and other long-term improvements within a reasonable period of time. Therefore, the strategy should clearly describe how it meets the following criteria:

- ◆ *Boundaries:* The grantee has identified the neighborhood's boundaries for which the strategy applies. All areas within those boundaries must be contiguous;
- ◆ *Demographic Criteria:* The designated area must be primarily residential and contain a percentage of low- and moderate-income residents that is not less than 51 percent;
- ◆ *Insulation:* The grantee must describe how the strategy was developed in consultation with the area's stakeholders, including residents, owners/operators of businesses and Financial institutions, non-profit organizations, and community groups that are in or serve the neighborhood;
- ◆ *Assessment:* The strategy must include an assessment of the economic conditions of the area and an examination of the opportunities for economic development improvement and the problems likely to be encountered;
- ◆ *Economic Empowerment:* There must be a realistic development strategy and implementation plan to promote the area's economic progress focusing on activities to create meaningful jobs for the unemployed and low- and moderate-income residents of the area (including jobs created by CDBG assisted efforts) as well as activities to promote the substantial revitalization of the neighborhood; and
- ◆ *Performance Measurements:* The strategy must identify the results (e.g., physical improvements, social initiatives, and economic empowerment) expected to be achieved, expressing them in terms that are readily measurable.

Neighborhood revitalization strategies should be designed to achieve substantial improvements in the delineated neighborhood area to create meaningful levels of economic opportunities for residents during the time frame of the City's approved Consolidated Plan. However, HUD does not require that a neighborhood be fully revitalized within that five year period, but that the level of improvements be substantial. Once HUD approves a revitalization strategy, the City may assume that this approval is in effect for the full time period of the strategy, as long as reasonable progress is being made in its implementation. HUD requires each revitalization strategy to include baseline needs information for the area and to set benchmark projections for the activities to revitalize the area.

The benchmarks should be readily measurable with specific results and should clearly represent positive steps toward the desired ultimate outcome: economic revitalization of the designated area. Each year following HUD's approval of the strategy, the City will need to identify in its annual Community Development Action Plan the outputs to be achieved by the end of that year.

The benchmarks should include measures of outputs to be achieved with the CDBG funds together with other resources. An example of outputs would be the number of new businesses formed or the reduction, by a certain number or percentage, of persons on welfare. Since the benchmarks are to reflect the expected level of accomplishments at the end of each program year, they must be measurable at such times.

10.6 Summary

Cities nationwide have been successful in improving the quality of life in their communities through Neighborhood Planning. The Neighborhood Planning Program in Round Rock is a collaborative program that seeks to provide neighborhood residents with the assistance and coordination that is necessary to promote neighborhood stability and improvement. The NPT Neighborhood Plans, NIPs, and HUD Neighborhood Revitalization programs all have been successful in this effort. With the goals and objectives of the General Plan 2000 as the guiding policies and the more specific Action Plans and ordinances as the implementation tools, Neighborhood Planning will continue to be a successful planning tool for the entire community.